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Independent Reading Researched Analysis: Outliers

Section 1:

Have you ever wondered how people become successful, and what the key formula to their success is? Usually when people are discussing a successor’s journey to accomplishment, they discuss their personalities and habits. But are their personality traits really what lead them to success? Outliers, by Malcolm Gladwell, challenges this interpretation of success by exploring success from a different perspective. The book examines the possible relationships and factors between success and luck, opportunity, timing, hard work, and influence of cultural background. Outliers’s analysis of accomplishment reveals the real contributions to great success.

Section 2:

Malcolm Gladwell is a very successful and knowledgeable author and psychologist. Gladwell is so successful some people even consider him an outlier himself. Gladwell began his career as a journalist for the *American Sector*, but his success did not start there. Gladwell finally began to gain great success after ten years of practice. This was the point in time when Gladwell wrote *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, which are “now [the] best-selling genre of pop economics, [and] together have sold more than 4.5 million copies” (Grossman). During the ten years that preceded the publishing of these ground- breaking books, Gladwell spent approximately 10,000 hours practicing his writing skills by working for papers like *The New Yorker and The Washington Post*. These thousands of hours of practice and hard work support Gladwell’s 10,000 hour theory that in order to prosper and gain success 10,000 hours of practice must be completed. Because of the immense success Gladwell has acquired throughout his life, many people consider Outliers a “coded autobiography: a successful man trying to figure out his own context, how success happened to him and what it means” (Grossman). Gladwell’s popularity and experience, in addition to his own completion of 10,000 hours of practice, provide him with the authority and knowledge necessary to be considered a credible author and journalist.

Section 3:

The subtitle of the book, The Story of Success, reveals the main argument of Outliers. Opportunity, the first part of Outliers, attempts to explain that “success is hardly ever solely the result of extraordinary innate talent but of other factors, such as luck, accidents of timing, exceptional opportunity and an appetite for plain hard work” (How did I do that? The road to success). This unusual explanation of success is described through theories like the significance of your birth date. Gladwell supports this theory by presenting professional hockey rosters. The rosters illustrate that the majority of the players have birthdays in the first three months of the year. Gladwell goes on to explain that the reason for this is the cutoff date for the season is January 1. Because the athletes with birthdays in the first three months of the year are older, they most likely will be more skilled, more mature, and more experienced than the athletes born in the later months of the year. These athletes will be recognized by the junior professional teams at a very young age and therefore will practice more, receive more attention and might eventually make it to the professional league. Gladwell gives a similar example in another chapter of the book relating one’s birth date and wealth.

As Outliers continues, Gladwell examines the luck and opportunity Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world, encountered on his journey to success. The luck Gates encountered relating to his computer programming career began when he was sent to Lakeside boarding school in seventh grade. During Gates’ years at Lakeside, the school started a computer club with a computer terminal available for student usage. Considering the high quality, this updated computer system was an extremely surprising and amazing program for a high school. This is especially remarkable because in 1968 most colleges did not even have computer clubs. Gates’ luck continued when a club from the University of Washington gave the members of the Lakeside computer club an opportunity to test the college’s computer system on the weekends in exchange for free programming time. After the club went bankrupt, Gates found a way to program at the university from three o’ clock until six o’ clock in the morning. He then got a job for ISI to work on a payroll software program and another computer programming related job at TRW. All of these incredibly lucky opportunities and series of events led to Bill Gates’ success. If Gates did not accept or was not offered one of these opportunities, there is a good chance he would not have become the incredibly wealthy founder of Microsoft. (Gladwell 50-55). Throughout the first part of the book Gladwell uses anecdotal and theoretical evidence like the importance of birthdates and the great luck and opportunity of Bill Gates to confirm the theories that prove the main argument of the book. The way in which Gladwell presents his argument and the argument itself are very effective in persuading the reader to believe the theories Gladwell presents.

In the second part of the book, Gladwell’s main focus is on “the effects of cultural inheritance and how it [can help and hinder]” one’s life (How did I do that? The road to success). The second part of Outliers, titled Legacy, explains theories in the same manner as the Opportunity section. A large portion of Legacy is spent on the explanation and justification behind multiple plane crashes. Gladwell’s theory is that many of these crashes happened as a result of miscommunications. The text suggests that these miscommunications occurred as a consequence of cultural issues like the immense range of tolerance ambiguity and power distance index levels between various countries around the world. Another chapter in Legacy explains the widely recognized mathematical success of Asians. In comparison with the English language, which is highly irregular and illogical, Asian languages like Chinese and Japanese have logical counting systems. This rational thinking helps Asian children learn mathematics easier and faster than American children, and therefore the people in the world with the highest mathematical intelligence are Asian. These examples strongly support Gladwell’s argument regarding cultural inheritance. The text in this section demonstrates the theories and ideas in a logically and easily understood method. In addition to these simple explanations, Gladwell uses an inspirational and optimistic tone throughout both parts of the book. The personal examples provide vivid imagery for the reader. Overall all of the rhetorical strategies Gladwell uses to entertain the article are very effective.

Section 4:

Although Outliers is an enlightening and accredited book, multiple criticisms of the book have developed. Throughout the book Gladwell uses theories as the basis of his arguments. Many critics believe Gladwell “fails to fully represent the swirling academic debates around these” theories (Conley). Despite the fact that the stories about successful individuals strongly support Gladwell’s argument, individual stories alone cannot prove relationships between social variables. Because Gladwell attempts to use individual stories to prove theories in almost every chapter, the validly of the book is severely undermined. Another criticism has also arisen regarding weak and faulty comparisons and the lack of counterfactual cases. In some parts of the book Gladwell does not offer a comparison at all. In the parts that he does, like the comparison of Langan and Oppenheimer, the two had almost nothing in common; they “differed in their class background, region, religion, parental nativity, and even birth cohort” (Conley). Some people also argue that in certain parts of the book Gladwell is unfocused and repetitive. This criticism is demonstrated in multiple chapters in the novel, but it is especially noticeable in the ethnic theory of plane crashes chapter (10,000 HOURS TO GREATNESS).

These suggested criticisms are all present in Outliers at some point, but they should not ultimately take away from this excellent and thought provoking book. The convincing diction and realistic personal examples make the book believable. Gladwell may have made a few mistakes by not providing sufficient information, but any additional information could have weakened the argument of the book. None of the criticisms regarding Outliers greatly conflict with the main argument of the book. Considering Gladwell is a very successful and well known author, no criticism can undermine the book completely.

Section 5:

Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell creates a new fascination and curiosity about the lives of successful people. The book explains that “success arises out of the steady accumulation of advantages: when and where you are born, what your parents did for a living, and what the circumstances of your upbringing were all make a significant difference in how well you do in the world” (Gladwell). Great success does not develop without the presence of luck and opportunity. Gladwell presents a variety of interesting and inspiring individual stories that relate to his argument about success. His theories explain the importance of interpreting and comparing the relationships between one’s background, culture, and family history to success. Through the book Gladwell wants people to be aware that society, has control of whom and how many people succeed .Outliers describes success in a different way than most people describe it. This description attempts to assist the readers to understand the success of successful people in a positive and motivational manner. Outliers is an informative and remarkable book that expresses success as a sum of countless unpredictable factors.

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